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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PDP CONVENTION - NO DEBATE EXPECTED

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. As the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) approaches its April 20 Special National Convention, behind the scenes negotiations appear to have forestalled any real debate taking place on the convention floor. PDP National Executive Committee member Aminu Bello Masari told Poloff on April 15 that the Committee had already reached an agreement to remove 2006 constitutional amendments that de facto reserved the Board of Trustees Chairmanship position for former President Obasanjo, but to allow Obasanjo to finish out his 2006-2011 term. On April 16, PDP National Secretary Abubakar Kawu Baraje dismissed the much-publicized notion of automatic renominations for PDP incumbents not facing term limits as "anti-democratic" and no more than simple posturing. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) PDP National Executive Committee (NEC) member Aminu Bello Masari (protect) told Poloff on April 15 that he expects no fireworks at the April 20 PDP Special National Convention. According to Masari, the NEC reached a compromise at its meeting on April 2, resolving to remove 2006 amendments to the party constitution that de facto reserved the position of Chairman of the party's Board of Trustees (BOT) for former President Olusegun Obasanjo. As part of the compromise, Obasanjo will remain BOT Chairman until the end of his current term in 2011. (Note: Originally, discontented members of the party had sought not only to amend the party constitution, but also to remove Obasanjo as BOT Chairman. End note.) Masari was critical of what he saw as anti-democratic tendencies in the party over the past few years, such as moves to reduce the number of elected delegates, while the number who were essentially the staff of state governors was increased. Masari told Poloff he hopes the newly announced (but still amorphous) opposition "mega party" (septel) will succeed, saying that it would be "good for the country." Although he maintained he has no ties to the new mega party, he appeared ambivalent to his own PDP, stating he would not attend the convention "unless somebody feels that I should be there." (Bio Note: Masari was former Speaker of the House of Representatives (2003-2007) and a founding member of the PDP.)

¶3. (C) In an April 16 meeting with Poloff, PDP National Secretary Abubakar Kawu Baraje dismissed the notion of "automatic tickets" (i.e. unchallenged renominations for

incumbents not facing term limits) for anyone -- sitting governors, members of the National Assembly or even the President. Baraje told Poloff, without a hint of irony, that automatic renominations would be "anti-democratic, and of course we are the People's DEMOCRATIC Party." Baraje claimed discussion of automatic tickets in the press was simply posturing of no consequence. Poloff asked Baraje if there had been any criticism within the party of the fact that Baraje, Governor's Forum Chairman Bukola Saraki, and PDP Convention Chairman Shuaba Lafiagi are all from Kwara State. (Comment: Given Nigerian sensitivities to "federal character," or the idea that all positions should be balanced by zones and states, this is an unusual confluence of influence for one state, particularly within the PDP, which normally goes out of its way to "zone" party positions. End Comment.) Baraje replied that "many people have expressed such nonsense" and suggested that the Nigerian press loves a conspiracy. With regard to the possible return of former Vice President Atiku Abubakar to the PDP party, Baraje told Poloff, "He will have to go back to his ward and wait his turn behind all those who did not leave the party. He will not receive any special treatment."

14. (C) COMMENT: As happened in 2008, it appears, yet again, that back room deals will take the place of open debate and democratic processes at the PDP convention. If Obasanjo does in fact retain the BOT Chairmanship, we expect that Atiku's return to the PDP for the 2011 elections will be virtually a dead letter (see septel). Baraje's reaction to Poloff's observation about the prominence of so many key party officials from Kwara State suggests that there is some

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sensitivity to the rise of influence of the Saraki family and its Kwara network. Post notes that, reflecting the economic times, President Yar'Adua slashed the convention budget from 400 million naira (US \$2.7 million) to 100 million naira (US \$680,000) on April 15, announcing that "the era of flamboyant jamboree is over." End Comment.

15. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS